

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58984/smbic2301179j>

## **THE ROLE OF OPERATIONAL MANAGERS ON THE MOTIVATION OF ATHLETES**

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**Abstract:** Operational managers in sports are a key link in the management team and in their independent programs they plan, organize, predict and control the athletes and the team, as well as implement appropriate strategies to beat the competition and achieve good results. They manage the most important resources - the athletes and carry out personnel policy over them by way of selection, elections, determining the tasks and roles of the players in the team and are the main motivators of the athletes. We conducted a survey of a sample of 20 respondents, operational managers - coaches from the Macedonian football league, in order to determine the attitudes and opinions about their role and influence on the motivation of athletes in sports clubs. For the research, we used a survey questionnaire as a measuring instrument. After analyzing the survey questionnaire, we came to the conclusion that:

- Spreading the vision, mission and goals in a sports club is the responsibility of the operational manager, where the majority of respondents believe that, apart from them, these characteristics should be possessed and implemented by every member of the management team.
- The majority of the clubs and operational managers as an integral part of them, pay great attention to the motivation, to maintain it at a high level among all the athletes and the team as a team, which they consider to be a key factor for achieving the set goals.
- Various motivational speeches, messages and awards in the form of finances from the management are considered part of the motivation in order to

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maintain it at the highest level, which are part of the external motivation, and the internal one has the key role for every single athlete.

- In sports clubs where there are sufficient financial resources, operational managers try to maintain motivation with a sports psychologist, who will additionally motivate them through various methods, all with the aim of preventing monotony from occurring, which can lead to various unwanted decisions in athletes.

**Keywords:** sports clubs, operations manager, athletes, power, authority, motivation, sport, football, motivator.

## **Introduction**

In the present and especially in the time to come, in which the most important resource is people, and at the same time the most important factor of the effectiveness and efficiency of the enterprise and therefore of its competitiveness, growth and development, motivation (all stakeholders, especially insiders) is emphasized as the peak of the interest of all the bearers of responsibility in the company. Motivation can be defined as the process of moving, directing and maintaining human behavior towards a specific goal. The athlete, that is, every person has conscious and unconscious reasons why he behaves in a certain way. Those reasons are defined as motives. Motives are incentives that direct human work towards a specific goal, maintain work and increase its intensity. Motivation can be defined as the process of moving, directing and maintaining human behavior towards a specific goal (Ivancevich&all, 2005). Motives are the driver of human activities, they direct them in a certain direction and maintain them until the goal is fulfilled. Many researchers and operational managers have addressed the question: what drives human activity? Getting the answer to that question is essential for operational managers who can motivate athletes toward achieving high goals. The reason for this is simple: sports clubs achieve their goals in the same way that operational managers and athletes achieve their assigned work tasks.

## **Defining motivation and motivation in sport**

Anyone who knows the reasons for our behavior and how consciousness does not reach them holds in his hands a powerful weapon to influence what we do. That's why this aspect of human psychology, called motivation, causes great interest and is considered one of the most important in personnel management (Uzunov, 1998).

Motivation is a set of concepts used to explain the reasons for human behavior and the logic through which people choose their actions. Motivation is a key factor in understanding human behavior. Motives are internal triggers of action. By understanding human motives, we can direct certain behavior in a desired direction. Knowledge of human motivation is key to understanding overall human functioning within the organization as well. That is why motivation is the most studied (O'Reilly, 1991).

Motivation is the most important psychological component of sports activity. Motivation mobilizes the person to realize his abilities, knowledge and skills. Sport in itself is an inexhaustible source for motivation, for the expression of abilities, but also for expanding the boundaries of the feeling of satisfaction, especially the ultimate experience, which occurs at the moment of self-actualization, which, according to the theory of the hierarchy of human needs (Maslov, 1982) represents a need of the "highest order". High motivation contributes to an increase in mental and physical performance to achieve high competitive results. In such cases, motivation is a positive stimulus and the athlete is obliged to be able, through self-suggestion, to bring himself to a situation of admiration, increase interest in achieving high results, strengthen perseverance - persistence in achieving goals in readiness for everyday overcoming the increased efforts (Keramiciev, 2006).

Personal motives are identified as the main driving forces, both in the process of long-term and difficult training, as well as competition motives, the motive for joy and pleasure, and the motive for the result. Motivation is the basis of every sporting effort and success. Without the desire and determination to improve performance in sports, all psychological factors such as self-confidence, intensity, concentration and emotions have virtually no effect. For an athlete to be the best, he needs motivation to increase his abilities and achieve his goals. To give their best, athletes must persevere in the desire to grow and progress every day as well as make a work plan with a specific time limit that will lead them to achieve the set goals. Motivation in sports is very important because there must be a desire for progress and work even in those moments of fatigue, monotony, pain, depression or any other desire to start doing other things. Motivation must exist in all segments that influence the success of sports: mental preparation, technical-tactical training, nutrition, good sleep, etc. The reason why motivation is so important in sports lies in the fact that it is the only segment that can be absolutely controlled. Motivation directly affects how effective your performance will be, and it is absolutely the only factor that cannot be directly influenced. If you are extremely motivated to improve your performance, then you will find the time and the way to improve it. Motivation affects the level of readiness when the competition itself begins. If we have two teams or players who are identical in techniques, tactics or physical skills then motivation is the deciding factor for the winner. In other words, the winner is the one who is more motivated.

Often when it comes to sports and the motivation in it, we start from the operational manager himself - a coach as he motivates the players. The coach should know how to motivate the athlete as an individual, regardless of whether it will be for a shorter or longer period. If he succeeds in that, the athletes will show more interest in work and training, and if he fails, the athletes will behave the opposite, i.e. they will not give their best. Motivation in sports can best be described as the desire of athletes to achieve success with their results. It is very important for the athlete to know himself, which can motivate him to achieve the set goals. Coaches know how to emphasize that, because motivation and sportsmanship are the ones that need to be maintained even when the athletes are in that period when they experience their decline, which cannot be avoided in the sports career of an athlete. Of course, everything depends on the sport he plays, but since our respondents were football operations managers, motivational speeches before the match itself are very important, even at halftime, the coach should know how to motivate a player who has noticed that he is not giving his best. at most, he thinks he can do it.

In sports during training or competition, there comes a time when the player already feels tired and does not do it with desire. That moment in practice is known as the moment of "boring point". It is something that separates successful athletes from those who have not achieved their goals. Many athletes when they reach this point either give up completely or partially, giving up only work, effort and full commitment to training. Motivated athletes will also reach a "boring point" but unlike others they will keep going.

Signs of low motivation are:

- Lack of desire for training to the extent it should be;
- Less than 100% effort during training;
- Avoiding, shortening or insufficient engagement in training;
- Effort that is not in accordance with the set goals.

"SOP" Formula - Main motivation means spending 100% of your time, effort, energy and focus on all aspects of football. It includes all the aspects that lead to being the best athlete. The main motivation to become the best athlete lies in the "SOP" formula. The letter S represents the direction. Before achieving the main motivation, he must consider all the options that football brings or requires. He has three options, one is to stop playing it, the other is to continue playing football at the level he is at, and the third option is to strive to be the best athlete. The letter O in this formula represents a decision. Of the three directions, he has to decide which one he will take. None of the instructions are good or bad, it's simply the player's choice and decision. Q stands for commitment. When he makes a decision, he must commit to it. If a player's decision is to become the best player then commitment will determine if he has the main motivation or not.

## **Subject and objectives of the research**

The subject of this research are the attitudes and opinions of 20 Macedonian football operational managers - coaches about the power and influence of motivation among their athletes in the sports club where they work.

The objectives of this research are:

- 1) To see who is in charge of spreading the mission, vision and goals of the club, i.e. who is the leader and whether he should create and initiate changes in the sports club.
- 2) To see the characteristics of the leader (captain, coach, manager) in their clubs, ie whether he is positive, honest and full of optimism.
- 3) To see if operational managers - coaches work in the field of motivation among their athletes and how they develop it in order to realize their goals.
- 4) To see the influence and power of leadership on the motivation of athletes.

## **Methods**

The survey method was used for this research. As a measuring instrument, a survey questionnaire was used, which is composed of 10 questions, which give an answer to what is the attitude towards motivation and leadership and how football coaches motivate their athletes in sports clubs. The questions are of closed and open type (9 questions are of closed type and 1 is of open type). The questions are asked clearly and unambiguously and the weight and form are adapted to the category of the respondents. A sample of respondents were 20 Macedonian football operational managers - coaches of different genders and ages. The survey questionnaire was conducted electronically through the [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) application, and it was completely anonymous. The processing of the data obtained from the survey questionnaire was carried out in the above application, and the results are presented in percentages (%).

## **Results and discussion**

The influence and power of the operations manager on the motivation of athletes is great. Motivation is a significant factor on which the success and work of a sports club depends. Because of that fact, we wanted to determine what are the attitudes of the Macedonian football coaches and how much they see themselves in the role of a leader and how they implement and maintain motivation in their teams. For the stated reasons, we conducted

a survey questionnaire. The results obtained from each question are shown in order. After analyzing the survey questionnaire, we obtained the following data.

When asked who is in charge of spreading the mission, vision and goals in the sports club, we got the following results:

- 35% of the respondents believe that the operational manager - the coach in a sports club should be in charge of spreading the mission, vision and goals in the sports club, he leads the players and he has the best communication,
- 35% of respondents believe that all employees in the club - management own the role of spreading the mission, vision and goals in the sports club and
- 30% of respondents think that it should be the general manager.

The operational manager and leader never takes advantage of his associates or followers, but looks to the best possible way to use his opportunities, the talent he has, his initiative to undertake some changes in the club. That's why we asked the operational managers - the coaches represented in the clubs if that characteristic is correct, that they take over and initiate changes in the sports club, and we got the following results:

- high level, 90% of the respondents answered positively, that operational managers create and initiate changes in the sports club,
- only 10% of the respondents believe that the operations manager should not create the changes in the sports club.

As a very significant characteristic of operational managers - coaches in any field is their positivity at all times, the charisma they possess, optimism, etc. The results of asking operational managers if they are honest, full of positive energy and optimism, we got the following results:

- a high level of 65% of respondents answered positively, that they as operational managers should possess those characteristics, while,
- 25% of the respondents answered that they partially agree, that the operational manager-leader can sometimes possess those characteristics or should possess only a part of them,
- 10% of the respondents do not agree on the possession of the mentioned characteristics.

Motivation - a word that has a very big and special influence on everyone in the sports club and especially on an individual field, and that is to influence and maintain the motivation at a high level in each of the athletes, so that it does not reach the point of boredom which is above stated but also to be able to persevere in achieving the set goals. When we asked operational managers whether they often work and pay attention to the level of motivation among athletes, we got the following results:

- 90% of respondents pay attention to the level of motivation among athletes, as a very significant factor for players, but only in this way will they be able to give the maximum for the team, and therefore they devote part of their time to motivation, while,
- only two of the total number of operational managers or 10% of the respondents do it periodically and only before a match, because they think it is enough to achieve success and realize the set goals.

Fatigue is inevitable in sports and that's why every operational manager - coach should know how to deal with it and how to remove it from the players in the fastest and best way possible so that they can work again with full intensity. When asked what they do in those periods as operational managers when the players are overworked, tired from training and matches, the answers were divided as follows:

- 40% of the respondents give the players a rest, whether it is a day or two to rest and then return to training,
- 40% of the respondents believe that they should be rewarded with external things such as prizes, premiums, some recognitions that will be of great contribution and additional motivation for the players to continue with the same intensity that they maintained and had, while,
- 20% of respondents answered that they take actions to maintain their motivation at the highest level, which contributes to players training, being dedicated to training and matches, being mentally prepared by a sports psychologist.

Given that we previously described the SOP formula and saw how significant its application and impact is, we asked operational managers whether they, as coaches, actually believe that with motivation they help athletes determine their path, decision and commitment to the training itself and football as a sport and whether they as coaches take guidance to help them with that. From the results of this question, 100% of the respondents fully agreed that in this way they will help the players to achieve the goals, directions and convince them that their decisions are theirs and they should stick to them.

Motivation should be constantly developed and maintained at a high level. When asked how they develop motivation in an athlete, we got the following results:

- 90% of operational managers in the clubs answered that they do this by telling them motivational messages and holding speeches that will further motivate them not only before matches but also before and during training,
- 10% of the operational managers think that it can be done and further develop the motivation among the players in such a way as to find an ideal pair for training, who will constantly motivate and improve each other, because working in pairs has shown that is more effective when done every day than when done individually every day.

Captain is a title given to one of the team members. The title is often honorary, but in some cases the captain can have significant responsibility for strategy and teamwork when the game is played on the field. In any case, this is a position that indicates honor and respect to one of the teammates, but we wanted to find out what characteristics the captain should have and possess according to the operational manager - the coach and in what way he determines him to lead his team. From the obtained results, all were the same, i.e. 100% of the respondents agreed that they choose him in such a way that he gives support and help to his teammates, but he is also fully supported by them, to be brave, determined, intelligent and know how to make a correct decision in a certain situation as the captain of the team itself.

In order to achieve success, it is important that athletes focus on the conative characteristics as much as they focus on the body. That's why sports psychology has been gaining momentum lately, helping many athletes improve their skills and reach their potential. With that in mind, we asked operational managers - coaches whether they think that the sports psychology used by athletes is a key factor for players and for building them as professional athletes with the greatest number, that is:

- 40% of respondents believe that this is so and that it is a key factor for a professional athlete, but that the clubs do not have enough finances and conditions,
- 35% of the respondents think that this is completely true and they agree with it, they probably apply it in their clubs and
- 25% of the respondents answered yes, but they do not pay enough attention to each player as an individual, but do it and act on them only collectively and if they consider and have time and finances, they do it individually for some or part of the players.

On the open-ended question to the operational managers what they do to motivate the athletes to realize the set goals, it can be said that the opinions of the coaches somewhat coincided and almost have similar thoughts about motivating their players to achieve it, which is outlined. In order to achieve the set goals, but also to build themselves as professional players, some of them consider that they maintain their motivation with various motivational speeches, messages, financial rewards, this includes premiums. The team spirit is represented to show that they are the best to lift the club to a higher level than it is, to instill the winning mentality and always be hungry and thirsty for new victories. Some of them believe that the hard work, dedication and daily monitoring of all the innovations in the club as well as the players themselves, how they train daily and how much they invest in themselves from training to training, in order to prove themselves in the match that is theirs every weekend as players but subsequently to achieve success for the club.



## **Conclusions**

Based on the obtained results we can conclude that:

- The operational manager - the coach should be as dedicated as possible, if he wants persistence he is the one who should show it first and if he wants some kind of change he should be ready to be the first to do it and take steps for that change. Consistency between words and actions is what characterizes operations managers, which creates trust and motivates the team. The operations manager is the one who provides constant support and assistance to the athletes, taking full responsibility for both the achievements and the problems that may arise during the implementation of the effort, the courage to make difficult decisions, initiate changes and know how to admit their errors if any.
- By creating an atmosphere and understanding, creativity and innovation is achieved by the joint work of all athletes in the team and thus the team atmosphere is created. It is the operations manager who communicates to team members the vision, its meaning and the value it will have when it is completed. In particular, the flow and completion of the effort should be considered from the perspective of individual team members and the vision for the future should be shared with them. It will ensure that team members see the benefits that they will personally have through the realization of the effort which can lead to greater motivation of the entire team.
- The operational manager of the team should be rational and set certain limits, at least his vision for the future, so that any deviation from the results will not lead to disappointment in the future.
- The operations manager is very important and he, as a person, deals with introducing, leading and motivating the team to achieve the future goals and vision of the club together with him. During training, players should learn to use the appropriate motivational tools, depending on the desired organizational culture and goals of the club. By becoming familiar with performance evaluation methods and rewarding the desired behavior and results, players in their future work will be able to create a reward system in accordance with the needs of the team that encourages the desired team atmosphere and maximizes business results. The use of appropriate performance measurement systems and a permanent system of rewarding and motivating directly affect business results, increase cohesion within teams and the organization as a whole, as well as employee satisfaction in general, which returns the club's investments in the development of itself area.

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